

# MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

## MODULE 11 & 12

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### 11.1 UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

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What is the Media?

What is News?

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### 11.2 GENERAL TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

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Steps to Take Before Any Interview

During the Interview

After the Interview

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### 11.3 SPECIFIC KINDS OF INTERVIEWS

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Print Interviews

Radio Interviews

Television Interviews

Press Conferences



### ***Acknowledgements***

The information presented for this module and the next are drawn from the following publications available from **SeaWeb** ([www.seaweb.org/programs/asiapacific](http://www.seaweb.org/programs/asiapacific)):

“How to Communicate to the Media”

“Media Tips: Five General Guidelines for a Successful Interview”

“Reaching the Public through Radio”

## **OVERVIEW**

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*Working effectively with the media takes practice, but is rewarding because it can allow MPA managers to spread their message widely to local and national audiences. Radio, print, and television media are all different, but in every case, the MPA manager should focus on a single main point that is short and clear.*

Effective communication to the public can take many forms. MPA managers can reach out to the public themselves, by contacting local or national media, by giving talks and presentations, teaching in schools, and so on. Or, in other cases, a MPA manager may be contacted by reporters for interviews or panel discussions. Radio, print and television media all have different aspects, but for all forms, a MPA manager needs to be able to present a few main, simple points. Confident body language and verbal style can help communicate these points with effectiveness and believability.

Module 11 is designed to build your communication skills for communicating your message to the public, through interactions with radio, print, and television media. We will discuss the experiences you have already had dealing with media, and discuss tips for effective interviews and presentations. You will practice these skills in mock interviews, and you will develop a short presentation for a press conference tomorrow.

## **IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

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Conservation always hinges on the support of the local people, but people will not support something that they don't know about or don't understand. The media can be a powerful tool that enables MPA managers to communicate to the local people. A MPA manager that knows how to use the media effectively will be able to communicate why the MPA exists and why we believe that conservation of marine resources will benefit everybody in the end.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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- ✓ Understand how reporters think and what sort of message to give to them
- ✓ Improve your own comfort level for dealing with media interviews
- ✓ Learn about the many different ways of communicating with the public

## **LINKS TO OTHER EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AREAS**

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### ***Community-based Management***

The essence of community-based management is to enlist the community's support for a certain management strategy. This can only happen if the local public has had an opportunity to hear about the management strategy and why it is important. Media communication skills are essential for spreading this information to the public.

### ***Enforcement***

A critical part of enforcement is making sure that local fisher people know what the rules actually are, that they are being enforced, and what the penalties will be if they break them. Communications will help convey this crucial information to the local population.

### ***Sustainable Tourism***

Media communications can serve as marketing to attract tourists to the area. Also, tourists need to have guidelines about which tourist activities are good for the environment and which can be harmful, and need to be informed about regulations. Media communications will get this message across.

## **INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS**

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### **Assessing what you have learned about communications skills**

At the end of this training module, you will discuss with your group what you have learned about the differences between press, television and radio media, and how you can work with reporters to get your message to the public. You should feel more comfortable giving an interview or a presentation with confidence and clarity, and you will know the importance of condensing your message to a single important point. Your team will give you feedback on your presentation style and on ways you could improve further.

### **Long-term indicators of good communications skills**

A MPA manager should be able to

- ✓ Correctly inform and educate people about the MPA and its policies
- ✓ Respond clearly to media requests for information or interviews
- ✓ Reach out to media to announce new developments or describe ongoing programs
- ✓ Leave a clear impression of the MPA's position on any controversies
- ✓ Inform people where they can get more information and what they can do to help.

## LESSON PLAN

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### 11.1 UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

#### What is the Media?

The “power of the press” can sometimes be awesome. The media can inform us, enrage us and encourage us – to start or stop a war, to polarize and fight for or against complicated issues that affect us all. Behind the phrase ‘the media’ stand thousands of reporters and interviewers who have millions of minutes of airtime and hundreds of thousands of pages to fill every week. These busy people may not necessarily be well informed on your subject. In addition, many reporters work on general assignments, covering different kinds of stories in the same field or different fields every day.

One of the keys to successful spokespersonship is not taking a reporter’s questions too personally. For instance, don’t be overly explanatory with a friendly reporter, or too abrupt and cold with an impersonal reporter. Remember that reporters are conduits; **their** audience is **your** audience, so address your concerns to the ultimate consumer, customer or client, not just the media person asking you questions.

#### What is News?

If there are so many on-air hours and newspaper column inches to fill, why is it so hard to get on the air or in print? Because reporters and interviewers want *news*, which can generally be defined in three ways:

- **Hard News** – Hard news is the “story” now, the facts, the events that precipitate coverage by the media instantly. Hard news stories generally begin with: “The government today announced...;” “A new ruling that will affect the elderly was proposed today...;” “A new product was introduced this week...” The element of time, of immediacy, is a primary contributor to news value. Hard news is also known as “breaking news,” and spokespersons are often called on to see what their organization’s reaction is for follow-up coverage.
- **Features** – Features, or soft news as they’re sometimes called, are the stories behind the stories. Features aren’t about events so much as the background behind the events – the “why” of stories. Features can include a report on the issues underlying particular stories or trends – such as a television documentary or a series of articles in a daily newspaper. Timeliness is less critical. For the broadcast media, features can involve panel

discussions, prearranged by a reporter or producer, to discuss a specific issue in depth. The one-on-one show is a common feature format. Its formal structure is flexible, both for issues discussions and subjects of human interest. The feature area is the one in which most spokespersons find their outlet because much more air time and print space is typically devoted to the news behind the news than anything else.

- **Editorials** – Editorials are the “positions” or “opinions” stories about issues, usually developed by the editorial staff of a publication or broadcast outlet. The editorial pages or broadcast editorials are where media takes stands on issues. One of the fastest growing segments of editorial coverage is the “Op-Ed” (opinion/editorial) page, where experts on a particular issue who are not on the media staff are given space to express their positions. The growth of the Op-Ed format provides opportunities for audiences to absorb all sides of an issue. It can also provide you with vehicles through which to reach a broad audience.

## **11.2 GENERAL TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS**

If you watch television or read papers or magazines, you are well aware of the different types of interviewing styles that exist. Some interviewers are slow-paced; some use rapid-fire questioning techniques; some are pleasant and smiling; others are brusque and cold. Although you will find yourself reacting to these styles, *your* attitude, message, style and sense of mission should be maintained in spite of them.

### **Steps to Take Before Any Interview**

#### ***Know your subject, your audience, and your environment***

Increasingly, the style of presentation significantly determines the effectiveness of media interviews. But style alone cannot replace substance. The best way to approach interviews is to be familiar with your subject matter. Try to anticipate what the questions might include. Effectively approaching an interview also requires assessing the ultimate audience – their interests, educational background and familiarity with your subject area. In addition, you should know what kind of show, column or paper you’re dealing with, and the details of the audience it reaches.

Preparations also should include assessing the physical environment. If at all possible, have someone look over the room/studio in which your interview will take place on your behalf. How do the microphones work? Is a glass of water available should it be needed? Is the room temperature comfortable? Will there be outside distractions? For television, how close is the show set to the audience, if any? What kind of chair will you be sitting in?

To be most successful, you must understand both the physical and attitudinal environment in which you will be communicating.

### ***Determine Your Goals***

Ask yourself, “What do I want to accomplish with this interview?” Whether it’s public education, changing public behavior, policy change or fundraising, you have a better chance of being successful if you are clear about your goals and know what you wish to accomplish in the given time frame.

You can effectively communicate only one or two messages successfully in an interview. Identify only one message objective if the subject is complicated or the audience knows little about your subject. Two message objectives can be selected for a longer interview.

Many spokespersons say they feel like they’re being “judged” when they speak. In fact, they are, because interviewers tend to judge whether or not they’re credible, informative, interesting, etc. Communication By Objective helps you to single out your basic premise and then give the evidence supporting it so that you are believable. Communication By Objective can’t be too nebulous. It should establish a clear thought. An example: “My organization is doing everything possible to provide jobs for our community.”

### ***List Supporting Evidence***

After developing a clear message objective, begin listing your supporting evidence. What is your evidence? Imagine you made your statement and people asked: “Oh really, why?”, “Who says?”, “Where’s the proof?” Evidence is the information that establishes credibility and refutes negative attitudes.

The following techniques build evidence in interviews:

- Cite statistics (and mention the sources) when relevant.
- Use third-party, objective statements or studies that support your position.
- Use personal examples or the examples of those close to you.
- Use quotes from well-known people or people whose credentials are solid.
- Use size or age to demonstrate strength:
  - “We’re the largest, so we can offer economical....”
  - “We’re the newest and we’re hungry – so we’ll work harder....”
  - “We’re the oldest, so we have the most experience....”

To strengthen your evidence, use the following delivery techniques:

- Use positive words and phrases, like “accomplishment,” “increasing benefits,” etc.
- Stress solutions; tell what you’re doing that will help eradicate the problem, make conditions better, etc.
- Use hard verbs, action phrases such as: “We work to ensure...,” “Our organization provides constant service...”
- Use questions to pick up attention: “Do you know what I’m asked by people every day?” “Do you know what I encountered in my work the other day?” Then answer the question with the key point you want to make:



- Emphasize how easy it is to get more information on your subject when that is appropriate. Consider having a phone number, address or website where people can call or write for pamphlets or background.
- Always talk to the concerns of the ultimate audience. Put your points in terms of how they benefit them.

### ***Anticipate and Prepare Likely Questions***

Questions are what drive media interviews. So anticipate and prepare answers to typical (and tough) questions you might be asked. For many types of interviews, you can provide suggestions for questions, to the interviewer. (If you wish to do this, contact the interviewer in advance well before the interview; and understand that the interviewer may not choose to use your suggestions.) When preparing answers, keep in mind that crisp, punchy, straightforward answers are best. ***Do not memorize answers***, except for key phrases.

### ***Practice***

The one essential step before interviews is practice. Many people say they can't take the time to think of questions they might be asked and fill out the cyclical thought process, much less use a video or audiotape for practice. But, everyone who has ever had an interview will tell you one thing: "I wish I'd practiced more." None of us grew up with a microphone or camera focused on us. We must practice to be our best. Practice may not guarantee absolute perfection, but no practice will almost ensure an unsatisfactory interview.

### **During the Interview**

Each medium has certain sensitivities you should be aware of so you can better make your point. But no matter what medium is involved, these guidelines should be followed:

1. **Take the Initiative** – All reporters appreciate someone who is prepared to give information. So, without being too aggressive, take the lead in a conversational way and help direct the interview into the positive information areas you want discussed.
2. **Be Honest** – Never hedge or lie to the press. The printed word, audio or videotape is around for a long time. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and offer to follow up – then do so.
3. **Be Yourself** – Be personal. Not too stiff, too smooth or too overbearing. People want to see and hear from someone who is a real human being.

### **The following guidelines may also be helpful:**

**Repeat Your Message:** Know the one, two or three key points you want to make; have simple facts and figures ready to support those points. Use every opportunity to answer questions

and then reiterate one of your main points. Don't assume that anyone has heard your message before.

**Define unfamiliar terms** the first time you use them. Define any terms that a smart twelve-year-old might not know. *"What we see with aquaculture, or fish farms, is..."*

**Visualize your audience** not as colleagues at a seminar or Congresspersons at a hearing, but as fellow passengers on the bus or in line at the checkout counter. What words would you use to communicate with *them*? Speak simply and straightforwardly but never down to your audience.

**Know the Opposition:** This will not only allow you to be ready with a compelling defense, but you may also raise the issue first and defuse any potential disagreements. Consider putting the values behind the opposition's statements to work for your own messages.

**Make Friends with Your Host:** Even a host with an opposing point of view can be won over by a genial guest and may end up defending your right to express an unpopular view against the criticisms of hostile callers.

**Don't Underestimate Your Audience:** They will respect you to the extent that you demonstrate your respect for them. You may encounter a disrespectful caller or even host. (We only work with respectful hosts who appropriately handle the audience: please report any unpleasant situations). Simply return to your message: he will tarnish his credibility while you establish yours. Assume that your audience is capable of grasping your message if you express it well enough.

**Don't Be Afraid to Admit When You Don't Have All the Answers:** A minority of citizens cling to the notion that there is only one answer and they alone possess it, but most know from experience that no one has all the answers. They will respect you more if you admit when you don't have an answer than if you invent one that's not persuasive. It's a mark of your openness and pragmatism that you haven't yet found all the answers but are busy looking for them. Invite your listeners to join you in the search.

**Propose Solutions:** When describing the problem, include solutions that involve individuals, government and industry. If reasonable solutions are not readily apparent, people will be more likely to disregard the problem as too overwhelming and unfixable.

**Return to Objectives with Transitions.** During interviews, you are rarely allowed to state your position and evidence all at once. Sometimes opening questions are aimed far from your set objective, so you need to pull back to make your points. You want to "bridge" from your answer to an initial question to your own area of concern. So use transitional phrases to get back on track and smoothly bring the interview with you. A typical list of such transitions include:

- "As I said earlier \_\_\_\_\_"
- "Another point to remember is \_\_\_\_\_"
- "In addition to that, \_\_\_\_\_"
- "While \_\_\_\_\_ is true (important), let's not forget about \_\_\_\_\_"
- "Now that we've covered \_\_\_\_\_, let's focus on \_\_\_\_\_"
- "That's an important point because \_\_\_\_\_"

- “That question really has two (or three) answers. The first is \_\_\_\_\_, and the second is \_\_\_\_\_”

Such transitions help link up to the points you want to make. They make you a more polished, more professional spokesperson as well.

### ***When the Questions Come***

These techniques apply to *all* types of interviews and question sessions:

- Make sure the first and last things you say in response are clear statements of your intended message. Crisp and concise, yet simple. This is 80 percent of what reporters and audiences will remember about your answers.
- If a response doesn’t come immediately to mind, take a few seconds to phrase one. Buy time by rephrasing questions to your liking. Don’t talk while you’re thinking – this is too often the cause of long, confusing answers.
- Early in interviews, summarize your main points in one sentence or statement. When answering questions, refer back to these points continually and reiterate them as you proceed.
- If questions are coming two at a time – either from the same person or two people – answer only one question at a time.
- If you are one of several interviewees being questioned, take every opportunity to get your point across. Use phrases like “I’d like to comment on that, too, if I may.” “May I add a comment to that?” or “And I’d just like to add...” to tie into remarks by other speakers.
- Don’t interrupt other people who are commenting on your subject, but take advantage of natural pauses in their remarks to add your own views.
- Never lose your temper or appear to be ruffled or upset at a question. Don’t take interviewers personally, even if they’ve asked a personal question.
- Lead-offs to antagonistic questions might be “Let’s put that into perspective...” or “Let’s think about that situation for a moment...” You then appear to take on the voice of reason in the face of tough questions. Don’t be derogatory about an opponent or other persons on the program. Never take personal issue with interviewers, no matter how antagonistic the questions.
- Give direct answers to questions. To do otherwise appears evasive. If answers to questions must be “no,” don’t wait to say “no” at the end of your answer. Say “no,” then give the explanation.
- Avoid using the editorial “we” and time-wasting phrases, such as “That’s a good question...” and “I’m glad you asked that.” They sound judgmental and insincere.
- Think of your answers in terms of news items. First, give the headline. Then, give more pertinent supporting detail because people tend to remember the first thing you say. And interviewers will appreciate the news up front. Also, if editing occurs, you want your positive, newsy answer to follow the question immediately.

- Dispel misconceptions immediately. Never allow interviewers to ask negative questions and get away without correction. Once you have dispelled the misconceptions, go on to make positive points so the reporter won't have an easy time getting back to the mistake.
- Use the "loaded" question to your advantage. This is the type of question that makes a charge and puts you on the defensive. It's a technique of aggressive interviewers. Respond to the implied charge immediately with a strong rebuttal, citing examples to back up your response and correcting any unfounded allegation.
- Do not repeat hostile questions or negative phrases. *Never* let someone put words in your mouth. Instead rephrase the question in your own terms. Try to rephrase irrelevant or hostile questions in a manner you can answer. For example, you might say, "I believe what you're asking is..." and fill in your own version of the question.
- Avoid questions that suggest an either/or response. Such a question might be: "Do you follow a policy of maintaining a low profile during unfavorable publicity, or do you try to dodge hostile questions and comments?" Don't choose either alternative; instead, immediately state your policy in positive terms.
- Acknowledge At Least Some Small Point of Agreement. Then go on to make your point, carrying him or her along with you. Use every opportunity to answer a question as a bridge back to one of your main points.

### **After the Interview**

Thank the host/hostess/reporter for the chance to explain your views. Even if the questions have been challenging or non-productive, always be gracious. Send a follow-up thank you letter. Also, offer to make yourself available for other questions or appearances.

## **11.3 SPECIFIC KINDS OF INTERVIEWS**

### **Print Interviews**

In media interviews, reporters control what goes into the stories for the most part. That is, certain angles and specific quotes will be selected to make the story achieve the interviewers' purposes. However, print interviews allow you to elaborate on points and correct statements that might need recasting. Such corrections obviously are not possible on a live broadcast interview. Consequently, print interviews give you an advantage in presenting your point of view and allow your added control over interview situations.

Good reporters usually will try to put you at ease and get you in an explanatory mood. The more you talk, the more information they have to use for quotes that suit the purposes of their story. With this in mind, you should try to be as relaxed and friendly as possible in an interview situation.

Reporters usually can sense hostility. When they do, they tend to take the least favorable route in interviewing and assembling their story.

Being friendly does not mean being overly talkative. Try to keep as close to the point of the question as possible. The more concise the answer, the less chance there is of being quoted out of context.

Reporters are often given assignments to produce broadcast or written stories concerning subjects about which they know very little. Therefore, you may be faced with a question that is so irrelevant that there is no real answer to it. The best technique to use here is to rephrase the question into something that is based on facts you know, and then to answer *that* question. Another approach is to answer the question with a question, in effect forcing interviewers to explain their point of view. The answers you receive will provide you with a more precise question to which to respond.

In delicate situations where you must check before giving an answer or when you just don't have all the facts, feel free to say: "We're studying the matter," or "We'll get back to you with the answers." Never say "No comment." But do get back to them (ask what their deadline is so you can beat it).

Regardless of what reporters say about "on or off the record" or "not for attribution," **you must assume that everything you say may be used. There is no such thing as "off the record."**

Here are some additional points to be mindful of:

- Be wary of expressing personal opinion or conjecture. If you are speaking on behalf of your organization, you will be viewed as such. Avoid the temptation to say "Well, I can't speak for my organization, but personally..."
- Avoid using technical terms and in-house jargon. If you must use a term with which the audience is likely to be unfamiliar, explain it in a few simple words.
- Use simple, easy-to-understand facts and figures. Large dollar figures or other complicated statistics tend to confuse unless you give people a picture of what you mean. Percentages are easier to understand. Where possible, round off or use small numbers as illustrations.
- When you're on the air and the reporter says, "Thanks for being here," the appropriate response is "Thank you." On television, accompany that with a positive nod of your head. Anything more seems effusive.
- Offer your schedule to reporters for the days following interviews in case they wish to check facts with you later.
- Never ask to see a copy of stories *before* they go into print or on the air – but you can request a "tear-sheet" or copies of articles or broadcast tapes afterward (be sure to make such a request within three or four days).

## **Radio Interviews**

Radio is a widespread and popular medium. It is generally a comfortable venue, but one drawback to radio is that the audience can be easily distracted. If your voice and message aren't compelling, no one listens. Conversely, you don't want a booming voice because it doesn't sound natural.

Most radio interviews are conducted by phone, whether live or taped for later broadcast. When preparing for a radio interview, choose a reliable telephone that has a good connection and is in a quiet location. Do not use the speakerphone function. If your office is heavily traveled by others, consider placing a "do not disturb" sign on the door for the duration of the interview. Do not take calls that arrive in the minutes before an interview. Turn off any alarms or cell phones that may suddenly distract you. Have a cup of water or tea on hand should you become thirsty. Assemble any notes that you may want to refer to during the interview, you may want to lay your notes out flat on a desk in front of you to avoid the sound of rustling pages.

If you are being interviewed in a studio, don't get distracted by the studio environment. If a distraction occurs in the studio (technicians moving behind the recording room glass, people rearranging something in the studio, etc.), don't stop. The listeners can't see what's going on. They'll just hear your pause. For this reason, just as in any interview, focus on the interviewer. You're allowed to have some notes with facts in front of you, so you can check those occasionally if you need to.

Following are suggestions to keep in mind for radio interviews. These suggestions also apply for print and television interviews as well as presentations and platform appearances:

- **Volume** – Establish a normal, conversational volume and then vary it to make a dramatic statement, to emphasize a key point or to grab waning audience attention. Variety can mean either lowering or raising volume.
- **Rate** – Vary the delivery rate of your words to offset monotone and create emphasis. Be deliberate when reaching key points, then speed up at transitions. For brief sections and lists of facts, sometimes a rapid-fire pace adds interest.
- **Pauses** – Pause to punctuate, either before or after stating a major point. Be sure to avoid non-word sounds such as "er" and "ah."
- **Tone** – Try to end most sentences on an up tone. Too often we let sentences trail off (or down tone).
- **Inflection** – In normal conversation, pitch and tone help define the meaning of the words you are saying. This is critical to making presentations sound natural, interesting and worthy of both yours and the listeners' time.

- **Articulation** – Speak clearly and distinctly, but naturally. Be sure to hit final consonants in words crisply.

Here are some additional tips for radio interviews:

**Use Anecdotes.** Radio is an oral medium and stories are an oral tradition. Use them to humanize your arguments and give abstract issues a tangible form.

**Repeat Your Message.** Unlike the print media, words spoken on the radio vanish the moment after they are uttered. Know the one, two or three key points you want to make; use every opportunity to answer questions and then reiterate one of your main points.

**Avoid Long Pauses.** Radio abhors silence. The pauses that punctuate a face-to-face conversation come across on the air as blank space. Phrases like “Well...” and “You know...” can be used to buy time while you figure out what you want to say.

**Be Yourself.** Radio is dominated by colorful personalities, so you should not hesitate to let yours shine. Since most of your interviews will be by telephone, you can easily view them as simple conversations. Relax and be yourself.

**Let Your Passion Be Conveyed in Your Voice.** Passion carries well on the radio, which unlike television is a warm medium. Return to the roots of your commitment to your work and speak from that conviction.

**Cultivate a Sense of Humor.** You will be better able to retain your audience if you can laugh once in awhile. Nothing is more deadly than taking yourself too seriously.

**Use Specific Facts.** Avoid generalized statements like, “Many acres of farmland will be lost.” Simplify statistics, say, “3 out of 4” rather than, “75%.” Use facts that relate to people’s everyday lives or experiences like, “the water we drink...” *Use statistics sparingly on radio*; they work better on TV, where charts, like pictures, can be worth a thousand words. Still, a few well-chosen facts can bolster an argument. Select them carefully for maximum effect.

**Address Your Listening Audience Directly.** Always keep in mind that your real conversation is with your listeners, not the host or callers. Visualize them in your mind's eye and turn inwardly in their direction.

**Give Your Listeners Something To Do.** Write a letter, call a Congressperson, contact someone for more information, or spread the word among friends and colleagues. Give the website address of your organization. Not everyone will follow your advice but some will, and all will appreciate knowing that something can be done

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## **Television Interviews**

The glamour of television is not to be belied, but it is the most exhausting medium of all. Here are basic rules that you should follow:

- Keep your eyes on the host/hostess. This is a very uncomfortable thing to do, because in real life you wouldn't be that focused. One of the cameras will be on your face as you talk to the interviewer. But you can't know when that camera is going "on" over the air. So keep on looking at him or her.
- In any interview situation, but particularly on television, where and how you sit in relation to others can have an effect on how you come across. Try not to sit between two interviewers or between another guest and the interviewer. Sitting in the middle puts you at a disadvantage, because you must constantly turn your head from one side to other to answer questions. If you are forced to sit in the middle, do so graciously, sit forward, look at the others when they speak and take the initiative to speak up.
- Shows usually start with a "long shot" (the whole set) and then the camera moves in from medium-to-close range shots. Be aware that your face or entire body might be on at any time. Also, be alert, sit halfway back on the seat and slightly forward, and have a pleasant expression on your face (unless it's a sad, negative or hostile situation, where you're expected to look concerned, but never angry).
- Avoid sudden body movements (standing up, leaning back in chair) that may take you out of camera range or surprise the interviewer.

## **Press Conferences**

Press conferences should be called only rarely to make major announcements that need clarification or may provoke many questions. If they are called too frequently, their significance and importance will diminish.

Top officers and staff representatives should be the focal point. They should be supported by public relations specialists who can provide expert knowledge in site selection, inviting and following-up with media, staging, preparing statements and preparing answers to expected questions.

Some important considerations:

- The participants should be briefed about the invitees in advance. By knowing who will attend, they can better anticipate the mood of the conference, what questions might be asked and whether the conference will be taped or filmed.



- From the outset, establish the format of the press conference. Decide who will speak, on what and for how long. Allow time for questions and answers.
- Open with a prepared statement. The statement should be brief and to the point. A press conference is not a platform for a lengthy speech.
- Do not allow one questioner or reporter from one medium to dominate. Magazine and newspaper reporters resent the fact that speakers often pay more attention to the “lights-camera-action” broadcast media. So, try to entertain questions from all segments of the media spectrum that may be present. A support person should identify who these reporters are.
- Answer one question at a time, be thorough and concise. If you cannot answer certain questions, tell the reporters you will provide the information as soon as possible. (Remember to respect their deadlines.) Or say that organizational policy is not to comment on such matters, if that is truly so.
- Defer answering questions that are not appropriate. If someone persistently asks questions requiring very technical or off-the-subject answers that may not be of interest to the rest of the media, offer to meet them right after the conference to answer fully. Then do so.
- Have a definite procedure for closing the conference. “I’ll answer just a few more questions” is one way to warn reporters that the formal conference is drawing to a close. Then be firm about ending.
- Thank all attending for their interest. If appropriate, announce that participants will stay for questions or give contact information. If not appropriate, simply thank the media and have support staff supply details to reporters.

In summary, dealing with the media is really just a matter of common sense and an application of good manners. Remember that the media have the responsibility to inform, discover, and reveal. Objectivity as the media see it may not be the same as you see it. Be fair and as helpful as possible with the media, and they’ll most often return the courtesy.